

How to Prepare a Historic Context for Individual Properties and Historic Districts

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation also offers guidance for documenting a historic context.

For a complete discussion of historic contexts, see *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, and *How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form*.

A historic context is a diagnostic document. It should provide the necessary information to enable users to evaluate resources for possible National Register eligibility and to prepare acceptable nominations.

Contexts may be organized geographically or thematically. A context will

1. explain the development of a geographic area or theme
2. identify what types of resources exist (in the geographic area or associated with the theme)
3. identify the important characteristics of each type
4. explain why an area or resource type looks the way it does
5. explain why the resource type is important in accordance with National Register Criteria
6. provide direction for evaluating resources

Outline for a context organized by geography (municipality, county, region)

1. Identify the geographic area under study
 - a. summarize its physical appearance: terrain, topography, vegetation, etc
 - b. summarize the built environment: overall density, arrangement, type/function, age, materials, style of buildings and landscape, and methods of construction; if clear periods of concentration are apparent identify and describe them
2. Summarize the history and development of the area under study
 - a. identify and describe periods or phases of development (major stages of growth, pivotal events, significant ethnic or personal associations, and political and legislative decisions.)
3. Identify the important themes associated with the area under study
 - a. identify the key patterns or forces shaping the development of the area
 - b. explain how they were important; keep the focus on the major themes and their impact
4. Identify potential property types
 - a. survey the built environment of the study area and analyze the findings to identify property types that reflect the historic development of the area
 - b. explain what each type reflects about the history of the area; explain what each type reflects about the important themes identified in the historic research.
 - c. describe the physical characteristics of property types, that is, the aesthetic and artistic values embodied in architecture, construction, technology, or craftsmanship assess the integrity of extant resources associated with each property type identified in the survey..

- d. describe the locational pattern of property types, that is, generalize where particular types of property are likely to be found, how they are arranged in relationship to each other, the landscape, and other structures
- 5. Establish registration requirements
 - a. for each property type, identify what an individual property or a historic district must reflect (significance and physical characteristics) to be considered eligible for the National Register.
 - b. outline the documentation standards for associating resources with the property types and theme
- 6. Include a bibliography

Outline for a context organized by theme (such as commerce, education, industry, etc; use the National Register Areas of Significance to identify potential themes)

- 1. identify the theme under study
- 2. identify and describe the geographic area
- 3. explain the development of the theme
 - a. identify the important periods/phases in the development of the theme
 - b. explain the importance of the theme in the history of the state or the specific area under consideration
- 4. describe the built environment resulting from the development of the theme over time—landscapes and structures
- 5. Identify property types that reflect the significance of the theme
 - a. explain what each type reflects about the theme
 - b. describe the physical characteristics of property types (as evidenced in architecture, construction, technology, or craftsmanship, and condition)
 - c. describe the locational pattern of property types (generalize where particular types of property are likely to be found, how they are arranged in relationship to each other, the landscape, and other structures)
- 6. Establish registration requirements
 - a. for each property type, identify what an individual property or a historic district must reflect (significance and physical characteristics) to be considered eligible for the National Register.
 - b. outline the documentation standards for associating resources with the property types and theme
- 7. Include a bibliography